

Running over a boat

My friends and I used to spend vast amounts of time water skiing on Lake Gertrude during our high school years. We would be out on the water all summer long, on weekends and even in a wetsuit in the winter.

Thinking back now, we did some pretty stupid and reckless stuff. We could begin skiing by being pulled off the dock or standing in shallow water or we would ski and then stand on each other's shoulders. One time we even skied at night. People knew not to sit out on their docks when us hooligans were on the lake, as we would certainly come by and use the wake of our skis to spray them with water. You were considered really cool if you could end your ski session by gliding right up to the beach and then just walking out of your skis onto the beach. As you can imagine, the results could be disastrous if your timing was off.

The big thing back then was to learn how to ski barefoot. Our technique of choice was to sit on a raft with our legs facing forward, and as the boat got fast enough, we could put our feet down on the water. Eventually you could feel the pressure of the surface holding you up, and the raft would be whisked away between your legs. You had to be going really fast to make this happen, which meant that falls were quick and spectacular. A side effect of bare footing was that it would push all the blood out of the bottom of your feet and they would itch terribly when the blood rushed back in later. I preferred wearing tennis shoes, as they not only protected my feet, but made me more maneuverable as well.

We were young, lucky and resilient and there were no accidents until one weekend when we were having a party with a lot of other kids. It was the end of the day, and getting so dark that we really shouldn't have been out there. I was driving, and the boat was full, with five other kids and one adult. Evidently, everyone was looking backwards towards the skier when she started waving frantically. I was driving, but never saw the small aluminum boat I was quickly approaching. Mr. Wright and a friend were out fishing at twilight in their little dinghy, when I plowed our 16-foot ski boat right over them. I felt the sickening crunch of fiberglass, and knowing that I had hit something, quickly put the boat in neutral. At the same time, I saw that the men had jumped out of the boat, one in each direction.

I had never met Mindy Wright's father, and had no idea that he was missing an arm. When he came up next to the boat for us to pull him in, and reached up with nothing but a stump, I thought for sure I was going to faint.

It was an accident and no one was hurt, and in 1974 that meant that nobody sued. My Uncle Jack was our insurance agent, and he made sure that the boat was replaced and new fishing tackle was bought. Lessons were learned, and once again, I was very lucky.

